

Nature's Finest Foods

Industry expertise in tree nut brokerage

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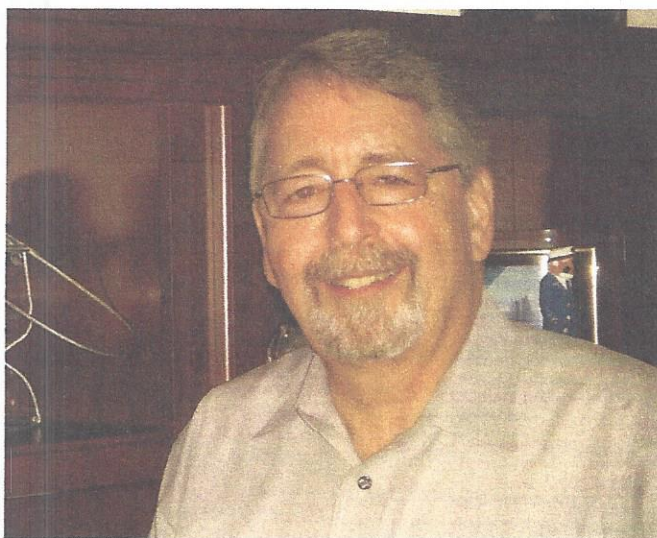
Nature's Finest Foods (NFF) was established by Daniel Zedan, president and owner, in 2000, specializing in the marketing of tree nuts. The business has grown significantly over the last 14 years, from a brokerage and consulting business to a major force in the industry. Zedan's expertise has shaped trade policy and helped to boost the marketing power of nut suppliers across the country. While he has more than 25 years of experience promoting these high-protein edibles, Zedan began his professional life in a very different sector.

Zedan spent eight years on active duty in the U.S. Coast Guard and another 20 in the reserves. He has worked with Standard Oil in marine safety and oil spill response and was eventually promoted to coordinator of product safety. While there, Zedan earned his MBA with a concentration in marketing. In 1984, while still active in the reserves, he met the owner of Navarro Pecan Company.

Together, the duo built up a large marketing firm focused almost exclusively on pecans. In 2000 Zedan decided to strike out on his own, working as a consultant with growers, tree nut processors, Fortune 500 companies and brokers. Eventually, Zedan's small brokerage and consulting operation grew into an internationally recognized source of information on the marketing of pecans providing information to major banks, investment firms and even some foreign governments.

Small but powerful

Including Zedan, NFF employs two people out of a single office in Batavia, Ill. The organization's primary goal is to provide end users with the best possible nut products available, procured through plants that adhere to strict food safety guidelines. In order to ensure a steady supply, NFF works closely with growers and processors to introduce new products and develop markets.



Zedan's clients include major brands such as Breyers/Good Humor, Unilever, Ben and Jerry's, Kroger and ConAgra, among others. Unlike many brokerage and consulting firms, NFF specializes almost exclusively in providing high quality tree nuts to industrial ingredient users. The product line

includes: pecans, almonds, Brazils, cashews, hazelnuts, Macadamias, pistachios and walnuts.

"We have a number of contracts to maintain so one of our staff members focuses exclusively on managing them," says Zedan. "In many instances, we set up the trucking, ensure that all of the documentation is prepared correctly, facilitate the transfer of funds, etc., which is especially important for products going overseas."

Zedan spends a lot of time traveling; making presentations, attending conferences, trade shows and meeting with clients across the globe. While a majority of the company's

business is domestic, NFF is constantly working to develop new markets in different countries. Pecans have taken on a growing role in the global marketplace. Zedan and his team have been working with several clients, agencies and organizations to help better promote pecans in new geographic regions while working to keep regulations reasonable and equitable on the homefront.

Connecting to customers

NFF has taken on several initiatives in recent years to support growers, processors and developing markets. "Right now we are working with the National Pecan Growers Council [U.S. Pecans] in the development of the pecan market in Turkey," Zedan explains. "Over the last two years, the industry has been looking at Turkey as a major new market. People there consume a lot of nuts, so pecans are a natural fit for a number of the products they make over there. The challenge we are facing is a very high tariff of 43 percent, plus a 1 percent vat tax. That is a 44 percent increase in cost, which makes it difficult to compete. Turkey grows a lot of almonds, walnuts, hazelnuts and pistachios. We don't want to compete with those domestic producers. We are trying to address this hurdle with the trade office in order to improve the potential for exports."

Zedan is also working closely with same group on the implementation of a federal marketing order for pecans, one that is similar to orders existing for the almond and walnut industries. "This is something that we have not had successfully in the pecan industry," he explains. "With the amount of product being sent overseas, it has become more important to look at funding mechanisms and ways to market better as an industry."



Furthermore, Zedan's drive carries throughout the company. "We are also involved domestically with two major initiatives involving proposed Food and Drug Administration regulations," he says.

As a member of the Peanut and Tree Nut Processors Association advocacy committee, NFF is assisting with lobbying efforts related to the Food Safety Modernization Act and a recently announced study focusing on the presumed prevalence of

Salmonella in all nuts. "The effort is broad based, addressing all segments of the industry, including growers, processors, end users and exporters," he continues. "The Food Safety Modernization Act, once enacted, will be the largest change in food safety regulations in the history of the FDA affecting both U.S. processors and overseas markets. We want to work with FDA to make sure that the regulations are fair and equitable to everyone and not a burden on U.S. processors."

A big concern for the tree nut industry is FDA's proposal to classify all nuts as produce and applying produce regulations to tree nuts. "As far as salmonella in tree nuts, nuts in general and pecans in particular, happen to have a big advantage in physical makeup and characteristics," he adds. "Nuts do not absorb water in the same manner as produce, and as such, there is significantly greater risk for salmonella in vegetables than in nuts. We want to get the grouping out of produce."

Zedan and his team are constantly working to improve the nut industry. NFF builds strong partnerships with both suppliers and buyers. To guarantee quality products that align with the business' values, Zedan personally inspects processing plants before signing on a supplier. He takes great pride in his team's ability to foster and maintain partnerships, all the while working to build success for the industry as a whole. Nature's Finest Foods is growing in all directions at once through quality products, service and expertise. •

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Navarro Pecan Co, Inc.

Kosher Certified SQF Level 3 Certified

Since 1977, Navarro Pecan Company has been dedicated to providing the highest quality pecans to our customers. Everyday we are striving to exceed our customers' expectations by supplying pecans of superior quality, providing excellent customer service and adhering to the highest standards of integrity. Enhance your ingredient with Navarro pecans!

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